

## DHSS Press Release

Date: October 29, 2012  
DHSS-125-2012

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### **Delaware Public Health: Safe Flood Clean Up Guidelines**

The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) reminds Delawareans of the importance of observing the following guidelines during and after a flood:

#### **SAFE DRINKING WATER**

If you are advised to boil your drinking water, heat water at the highest possible temperature so that it bubbles constantly (a rolling boil). Continue to boil water for one minute, and then let it cool. Store in clean, covered containers. Residents can also disinfect water using household bleach. Add 1/8 teaspoon (or 8 drops) of regular, unscented, liquid household bleach for each gallon of water. Stir it well and let it stand for 30 minutes before using it. Bottled water is another safe alternative.

#### **FOOD SAFETY**

Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water. Food containers with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped caps are not considered waterproof. Also, discard cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and home canned foods if they have come in contact with flood water. Discard canned foods with swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, fractures, extensive deep rusting, or dents that prevent normal stacking or opening.

#### **POWER FAILURE**

Do not rely on appearance or odor of food; use a freezer thermometer. If the freezer thermometer reads 40 degrees F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40 degrees F or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook. Perishable food such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk, and eggs not kept adequately refrigerated or frozen may cause illness, even when thoroughly cooked. Keeping refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible will keep food cold for about 4 hours. A full freezer will keep the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs or leftovers) that has been above 40 degrees F for two hours or more. Buy dry or block ice to keep the refrigerator as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic foot fully-stocked freezer cold for two days.

If you plan to eat refrigerated or frozen meat, poultry, fish or eggs while at safe temperatures, cook the food thoroughly to the proper temperature to kill bacteria. Wash fruits and vegetables with water from a safe source before eating.

For bottle feeding infants, use prepared, canned baby formula that requires no added water. When using concentrated or powdered formulas, prepare with bottled water if the local water source is potentially contaminated.

#### **CLEAN UP**

Floodwaters can dislodge tanks, drums, pipes and equipment which may contain hazardous materials such as pesticides or propane. Do not attempt to move unidentified dislodged containers without first contacting the local fire department or hazardous materials team. Wash skin that may have been exposed to pesticides and other hazardous chemicals frequently and thoroughly. Call the poison control center for additional instructions.

Wear protective gear and clothing, such as heavy shoes or boots, work gloves and safety glasses or goggles to help avoid accidental puncture wounds, cuts, abrasions, eye injuries and chemical exposure.

Wear a hard hat when working under structures and trees. Select cool clothing that is cotton and tightly knit; long-sleeved shirts and full-length pants are recommended.

Assure proper ventilation when using fuel-burning equipment. Fuel-burning devices in closed areas pose a great risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Provide plenty of ventilation when using a gas-powered pump for flooded basements or a gas-powered generator for electricity. Install and maintain carbon monoxide detectors.

Turn off the main gas valve at the meter if you smell leaking gas. Do not turn on lights or use torches or lanterns since they can ignite the gas. Leave the premises immediately and notify the gas company or the fire department.

Thoroughly wash countertops with soap and water, using hot water if available. Rinse, and then sanitize by applying a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Allow to air dry.

#### MOLD

Open doors and windows or use blowers to force fresh air into flooded spaces. Extract excess water.

Once water is removed, close doors and windows, run dehumidifiers and empty the water pan frequently. After water has been pumped from the basement, shovel out the mud and debris while it is still moist.

Hose down walls to remove as much silt as possible before it dries. Floors and walls may need sanitizing, particularly if sewage has entered the basement. Scrub walls and floors with a 10 percent bleach solution or other comparable commercially available disinfectant.

Oil stains in basements caused by overturned or damaged oil tanks may be a problem following flooding. Call a professional to remove oil residue.

Dealing with garbage and sewage can be challenging. Beware that sewage can backflow through floor drains into basements. Clean with a disinfectant. Never mix ammonia and chlorine bleach, which produces poisonous chloramine gas. If flood waters cause storm sewers to back up, fecal bacteria can be extremely dangerous. If sewage overflows in your home, wait for water to recede, then clean and sanitize all affected surfaces with bleach as soon as possible. After coming into contact with sewage or floodwater, wash your hands well and use a brush to clean under fingernails.

Residents with questions about flood recovery can contact the Delaware Division of Public Health's (DPH) Storm Recovery call center at 866-408-1899. The call center is scheduled to be open on Tuesday, October 30 at 12:00 p.m. (noon) to 4:30 p.m., and 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 31 to Friday, November 2, 2012. Hours may be subject to change due to call volume and storm conditions. For updated call center hours, follow Twitter #SandyDe or #StormDE.

For fact sheets on flood preparedness and recovery, visit the DPH website at:

[www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/floodhealthinfo.html](http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/floodhealthinfo.html).

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations.